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ABSTRACT

The urban school desegregation movement, which resulted from litigation initiated by racial minority groups, has accomplished its primary goal of eliminating dual public educational systems. But it has also had effects that are currently determining the future of educational policy and practice. Desegregation exposed the urgent need for providing equal educational opportunity for each individual. Moreover, it has laid the groundwork for meeting this new goal by undermining the hold of the social class system upon the schools. Recent attempts to promote equal achievement (manifested in such measures as minimum competency testing) are merely one more effort of elitists to control public education. In the past, elitist techniques excluded racial minorities, other minority groups, and women. These groups, having benefitted from desegregation, will no longer tolerate any educational approach that does not recognize the varying experiences and capacities of individuals, as well as the obligations of "the many" for each person. Minorities have successfully rejected the meritocratic view that what is good for the elites is good for all. Education is now seen as a process for maximizing self-fulfillment, not as an end in itself. In the future, these lessons of desegregation will be extended to the suburbs, where social-class segregated schools have yet to be dismantled. New schools of pluralistic populations will be created, and along with them will come new educational goals that emphasize truth and honesty as well as academic proficiency. These changes will occur as minorities continue to serve as creative dissenters who insist that this nation live up to its basic constitutional values. (KH)

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THE FUTURE OF DESEGREGATION AND URBAN EDUCATION

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Abstract from a set of papers on equity and equality in education prepared for the KEDS Desegregation Assistance Center for use in working with selected Ohio school districts.

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THE FUTURE OF DESEGREGATION AND URBAN EDUCATION

The decade of the 1980s probably will witness a reduction in litigation initiated by racial minority populations in the United States for the purpose of eliminating dual public educational systems within a common school district. Having achieved court-ordered unitary systems in which resources are distributed among the schools in an equitable way, urban education will be less concerned with inequality. How to provide equal opportunity for each individual to learn and to maximize his or her potential will be the new focus of attention in the future.

Equal educational opportunity is not what the Civil Rights and Urban School Desegregation movement was all about. This movement that resulted in multiple Federal court orders to create unitary public school systems was for the purpose of eliminating inequality in the distribution of educational resources. It was a movement for corporate justice as described by Joseph Fletcher (Situational Ethics 1966, p. 90), that involved the obligations of the majority to the minority and not a movement for distributive or contributive justice that have to do with the obligations of many to one or of one to many. The nation has not yet arrived at the point of guaranteeing equal educational opportunities for individuals. These are the educational requirements of the future. This will be the nation's task for the 1980s and beyond.

Equal educational opportunity for the individuals means that each person will be provided an opportunity to learn how to function in a way that fulfills his or her self-interests for the common good and that society will make it possible for each person to become what one is capable of becoming -- nothing more but also nothing less.

To date, few members of minority groups, racial or otherwise, have had the opportunity to become all that they are capable of being. A predetermined common goal that is implied in the concept, equal achievement, will be renounced as a relic of the elitist age of meritocracy that urban desegregated education is helping to bring to an end.

The attempt to publicly define equal achievement as the new goal of public education is a desperate and despairing final effort by the elitists to control public education. Their effort is manifested most visibly in the minimal competency testing programs that are trying to gain legitimacy as a common standard of achievement for high school graduates. These tests, of course, are designed by the elite. I predict that they will create a momentary flurry but eventually will fade away without the institutional support of an elitist dual public school system which rapidly is being eliminated through desegregation in urban education.

The elitists techniques that excluded racial minorities in the past, oppressed other minorities such as physically handicapped students, too. They and other groups, including female students, have benefitted from urban school desegregation as much as, and in some instances more than, the various racial minority groups. These groups in alliance with the racial minorities will not tolerate the institution of another elitist approach to education such as minimum competency testing that does not take cognizance of the varying experiences and capacities of individuals and the obligations of the many for each person, including the taking into consideration and if possible compensating for varying individual limitations, so that all may participate in social organization as extensively as they may wish.

Education as a process is compassionate, recognizes individual differences, and asks none to be more than he or she is capable of becoming but respects each person for what one is, was, and hopes to be. This new approach to public education will recognize that learning is the essence of education, not achievement, and that important learning can occur in situations of failure as well as success. Learning is an activity that occurs only in relationship with others. It is process, not a product.

Court-ordered racial desegregation of urban education during the decades of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, has shaken the foundations of this institution and has prepared it for the kinds of changes in the future that are discussed in this article. The fact that these changes have resulted from litigation initiated by racial minorities is in accord with social science theory. Columbia University sociologist Robert K. Merton said that "it is not infrequently the case that the nonconforming minority in a society represents the interests and ultimate values of the group more effectively than the conforming majority" (Social Structures and Social Theory, 1968, p. 421). In the Bicentennial edition of Harvard Magazine, I made a similar observation, that from the time of the founding of this nation minorities have always done the dreaming. Members of the Constitutional Convention were dreamers who believed it was possible to achieve a just society, notwithstanding the injustices of the eighteenth century. These dreamers were "male and white, merchants and manufacturers, property and plantation owners. Most of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention were lawyers by profession, not farmers, artisans, black and brown people, or women. The delegates were the minority during the Revolutionary period; and they were dreamers. The dreamers then were unlike most of the people. Most of the people were poor" (Harvard Magazine, July-August, 1976, p. 37).

The late James Allen, a graduate of Harvard and former Commissioner of Education in the State of New York acknowledged the significant contribution of minorities to educational reform in this century in his testimony before the United States Civil Rights Commission in 1966. He said, "I think Negroes in their demonstrations, in their peaceful demonstrations, have done more than any other segment of our society to push us to the point where we have now gone. I would urge that they . . . continue to make known to the American people that there are deprivations" (Hearing Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights in Rochester, New York, September 16-17, 1966, published, 1967, p. 207). The minorities in our midst today are continuing a grand tradition of creative dissent that was manifested in such events as the Boston Tea Party two centuries ago. The dissent then and now has had the same goal and method: the establishment of a democratic nation dedicated to justice and liberty for the common defense and general welfare of all citizens.

A problem is that many educational public administrators and policy-makers do not have the wisdom of James Allen and, therefore, do not recognize the beneficial effects of creative dissent by our contemporary minorities because they are unlike the majority. Today those who dream of a democratic nation dedicated to justice and freedom for the purpose of providing an adequate education for all are black and brown people, young and poor people. They are the minorities who probably represent the interests and ultimate educational values of this nation more effectively than the affluent white majority.

Despite the limited perspective, wisdom, and understanding of some of our most influential public administrators and policy-makers, minorities have continued to push for appropriate changes that would bring unity to the goals and methods in our various institutional systems so that they would

conform to the Constitutional values of the republic.

Desegregation in urban education has been the most visible institutional change that the racial minorities have pressed upon this nation. They did this by refusing to conform to an educational system that had become progressively unequal in services rendered to citizens. If they had ignored the tradition of creative dissent that has been the function of minorities in the past, the public schools in the United States would have become increasingly segregated and the method of universal education for the goal of enhancing informed participation in a republican form of government eventually would have been displaced by the method of selective segregated education for the leaders of a meritocracy. The racial minorities cut off this movement by their dissent, by ceasing to cooperate in their own oppression, and by taking their case against unequal education to the court for a judicial decision. Fortunately, they won. Because the minorities won, the nation also won as desegregated public education continues to serve as a way of including all people in public affairs in contrast to segregated public education that tends to exclude.

By desegregating public education in the cities today, the minorities have started or revived a process that the majority will have to complete in the suburbs in the future. In the Brown v. Board of Education decision of 1954, the Supreme Court described an equitable educational process as one in which a student of one racial group is able "to engage in discussion and exchange views with other students." Obviously, racial segregation prohibits this kind of exchange between black and white students so that the Court therefore declared it to be unlawful in public education.

The same could be said for social class segregation. This is the task for the future that will fall largely upon the shoulders of the poor minority in a nation that is predominantly affluent.

Education like health and justice is a national resource but is unlike the material national resources that have an exhaustable quantity. When some people have more material resources, others have less. Unfortunately some have viewed education as a resource that conforms to a distributive pattern that is similar to that of other material resources. Such an analogy when applied to education is wrong. Eventually there is no justice for anyone unless there is justice for everyone. The same may be said for health and education. The general welfare and accumulated knowledge are a function of individual well-being and the learning of each individual. They are resources that cannot be hoarded. They increase in value for anyone to the extent that they are possessed and shared by everyone.

For example, court-ordered racial desegregation in public schools already is beginning to teach this generation of city students important information about constitutional law and corporate justice. Such learning, of course, is beneficial for affluent suburban students too. But they may be denied this learning, while continuing to increase their verbal and mathematical knowledge, because of the social-class segregation that they now experience in school. Education in a setting of social-class segregation fosters attitudes of entitlement that are untempered by concerns about corporate justice. This kind of education is deficient.

I predict that people who study carefully the racial desegregation movement in urban education will realize its potential educational benefits for all and will undertake efforts in the future to extend this important learning to suburbs by dismantling social-class segregated schools. Integrated education by social class is the reform for the future that has been stimulated by the movement for desegregated urban education today. Desegregated social-class education will be achieved by eliminating snob

zoning laws in suburban communities that limit residents to affluent households only, by extending mass transportation systems so that automobiles are not required to go to and from work, by the development of cooperative programs between city and suburban school systems and even the consolidation of some into a single school district, and by Federal and State housing policies and programs that will make subsidized housing available in the surburbs as well as in the cities.

The coming together of students with different existential histories as those manifested by racial minority and majority group members has resulted in a broader definition of education to the benefit of all. Increasingly, education as defined by the dominant majority group in segregated schools was narrowed to that largely of learning communication and calculation skills. This narrow definition has taken such a hold that two of America's foremost educators, Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, declared in 1967 that "the best single measure over-all" of academic competence is the "verbal aptitude test." Further, they said, a "college anxious to investigate the question of academic 'value added' can . . . do so rather easily . . . by seeing whether the majority of its students improved their percentile rank or reduced it" when the verbal scores of seniors on the Graduate Record Examination are compared with those on the Scholastic Aptitude Test taken before entering college. Verbal communication skills clearly are identified by Jencks and Riesman as an indicator of "value added" by a college education. They set forth these ideas in a rejoinder to the criticism by several black educators of their study of black colleges (Harvard Education Review, Summer, 1967, p. 467).

Institutional systems, including educational systems, tend to change as new concepts become a part of them and are implemented, as existing

members of the system assume new roles and thereby assume new duties, responsibilities and obligations toward others, and as new clients with new needs are taken into the system. Any and all of these developments tend to induce change within a system as it adapts to new circumstances. The presence of racial minority children in previously segregated white schools and the presence of low-income children in previously segregated affluent schools will change these institutions as they adapt to the needs of all of their students -- the black, brown and white students, and the lower-class, middle-class, and upper-class students.

One change I predict that will come about in all school systems in the future as a result of racial and social-class integration is concern with truth and honesty as important indicators of "value added" in formal education.

The resignation of Richard M. Nixon as president of the United States was related to truth and honesty more than to intelligence as manifested by verbal and mathematical test scores. The resignation was a disgrace for him and probably a national tragedy for all of us. Certainly his performance as a national leader did not reflect glory upon the educational system of this nation that had tended toward a meritocracy. President Nixon was a product of this meritocratic educational system. He was recognized as a good student and he graduated from the Duke University Law School near the top of his class. He was an able speaker, very competent in terms of verbal skills, very intelligent and well informed. Yet he had to resign from the highest office of this nation not because he was ignorant or otherwise disadvantaged but because he was untruthful and dishonest. This is not my personal judgment. It is that of Patrick J. Buchanan who was assistant to the President, speech writer, and personal friend. According to Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, Buchanan said this to the Nixon

daughters and their husbands: "The problem is not Watergate or the cover-up. It's that [the President] hasn't been telling the truth to the American people. The tape makes it evident he hasn't leveled with the country for probably eighteen months. And the President can't lead a country he has deliberately misled for a year and a half" (The Final Days, 1976).

In like manner, the goals of education in the future will be radically changed in integrated schools to accommodate the goals of black parents who rank honesty and truthfulness more important than getting good grades. The goals of schools that will have black as well as white students because of urban desegregated education of necessity will have to adapt to the needs of their new clients. The education of all will prosper in the future because of the adaptations of the schools to these new students.

In summary, desegregated urban education in the future probably will spread from the cities to the suburbs and will include social-class as well as racial integration. Along with these new schools of pluralistic populations will come new educational goals that emphasize truth and honesty as well as proficiency in communication and calculation skills. These changes will occur as the minorities of this nation, whomever they may be, continue to practice the grand tradition of serving as creative dissenters by insisting that the nation live up to its basic Constitutional values of freedom and justice for all. This will hasten the downfall of our meritocratic educational system.

The most important outcome of desegregated urban education to date has been the breaking of the hold of the social class system upon the schools.

During this period of urban desegregated education, racial minorities have successfully rejected the meritocratic view that what is good for the

elite is good for all. With the aid of the Court, they have rescued the public schools from the control of a meritocracy caste system and have set them free. In the future, as the distribution of educational resources becomes more equitable and formal learning becomes more accessible, education as a process will be more important than education as a product; adequacy will replace the excessive concern about excellence; family or primary group welfare will become more significant than clan, ethnic tribe or secondary group achievement; development of the capacity to struggle will be more valued than cultivation of the capacity to succeed; and democracy will once more prevail.

Education in the future will be different and so will the society it is designed to serve. In due season, desegregation will be exhalted for its role in rescuing this nation from its drift toward an elitist meritocratic social system that excludes, and excludes, and excludes.

The liberation and reform of public education today by the school desegregation Court cases initiated by minorities is reminiscent of the way that societies have been renewed and regenerated in the past. Commenting on the role of minorities in the regeneration of human societies, Richard Korn has reminded us of the wisdom of Polybius that was expressed several centuries ago. In The Histories, Book 57, Polybius said , "When a new generation arises and the democracy falls into the hands of the grandchildren of its founders, they have become so accustomed to freedom and equality that they no longer value them and begin to aim at pre-eminence. . . ." Korn's interpretation of this statement is that "the inheritors of greatness waste the heritage. . . . The passive beneficiaries of liberty become oppressive." Then Korn asks this question: "Who . . . is left to keep the flame alive -- whence comes the regeneration?" His answer which also is my answer: regeneration for the system tends to come from the oppressed. Said Korn,

"Where is the light more cherished than in the darkness? And this, perhaps, is the complacent bigot's most bitter purgative: in the end he can be saved only by those who survived the worst he could do to them -- his victim" (Juvenile Delinquency, 1968, p. 195-196).

Perhaps one reason that the racial minorities have been able to contribute to the regeneration of society and its schools moreso than others is that they have continued to have hope.

Clearly, racial minorities have continued to believe in the efficacy of the Constitution of this country. Why else would they continue to seek redress for educational inequality and other forms of injustice in the courts. The racial minorities in the United States still value freedom and justice for the purpose of promoting the general welfare. These, of course, are the basic values of this nation. The belief of the minorities in these values helps to keep them alive, despite their serious challenge by an elitist meritocracy.